

Lighthouse Bible Church

April 12th, 2015

1st Thessalonians 3: 1 – 5 *Scripture Reading: 1st Peter 4: 12 - 19*

‘Growing in Faith’

Stand – Read – Pray

You remember at the end of chapter two Paul said that he and Silas and Timothy had people of the Thessalonians church **in their hearts**, because they were away from them and they had a **great desire** to see them face to face but Satan had hindered them from coming back.

Paul told the church people that they were their **hope, joy and crown of rejoicing** especially when they entered the **presence of Jesus Christ at His coming**, His coming for His church. He concluded by telling them that they were their **glory and joy**.

We have really got to see the emotional heart-felt love that Paul has for the people of the church at Thessalonica. You remember that his time with them was cut short because of the envious unbelieving Jews of **Acts 17: 5** got a mob together so Paul had to leave by night and flee to Berea.

But in that time that he had with the new believers in the church at Thessalonica, he became very close to them and as we saw in chapter one and two, was always thanking God for them and caring for them as a **nursing mother cherishes her children** or as a **father loves his children** because, he says, **they had become dear to them**. And that is why, at the end of chapter two Paul had such a desire to see them again, face to face.

And when you impart your very life into the people and ministry of that church, as he said he did in Chapter 2 verse 8, and then have to leave abruptly and you know that they are suffering persecution and you can't get back to encourage and affirm them because Satan has hindered that, your concern for them begins to grow because of the great love you have for them. And that is where Paul is and that is where we will pick it up in chapter 3 and verse one.

Verse One: therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone and sent Timothy...

You can just sense the desire in Paul's words that he was agonizing over where the people of the church of Thessalonica were at physically but more important, spiritually. He knew they were a new church and that they were enduring persecution as **1: 6** and **2: 14** said. He also knew that that kind of pressure could affect their faith and so he says **therefore, we couldn't endure it** any longer, we had to know how you are doing because he couldn't stand being separated from them with all that going on.

Even with what Paul had gone through and was still going through with his own trials and tests and persecution, as we will see in verses 3 - 4, his concern and longing was for the people of that church. That is the true heart of a Shepherd, Pastor, Elder, spiritual leader entrusted with the people of God.

One writer said this "A true pastor with a pastor's heart isn't concerned about his own success, he isn't concerned about his own reputation, he isn't concerned about his own trials, he is deeply concerned about the people who are the object of his affection. And that was Paul. *MacArthur GTY 1st Thessalonians*

In **2nd Corinthians 11: 22 – 28** Paul talks about his trials and sufferings; the beatings and stonings and shipwrecks and different perils; and then he says in Verse 28 **besides the other things, what comes upon me daily, my deep concern for all the churches.** It was a burden to his heart that he never got rid of because he loved them so dearly.

Paul bears a heavy burden and concern for the people of the church and he says sometimes it is hard to bear and Paul says that is the way it is here and I can't bear it any longer, I need to know how they are doing.

So he says **I thought it would be good to be left in Athens alone and sent Timothy.** Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to see how that church was doing? He probably thought that Timothy would be able to get back relatively unnoticed as compared to himself being there and causing a great stir. So he and presumably Silas stay in Athens and then Silas probably leaves for Macedonia later, leaving Paul alone. (*Acts 18: 5, 2nd Corinthians 11: 9*)

Paul trusted Timothy with the care and building up of the church so that is why he sent him. He sent Timothy to other churches as well to do similar things; like the church in Corinth in **1st Corinthians 4: 17** where he says **for this reason I have sent Timothy to you who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord..**

That passage in **Philippians 2: 19 – 24** where Paul sends Timothy to the Philippian church to be encouraged by knowing their state when he reports back. And He sent Timothy because Paul had no one like-minded who sincerely cares for their state like Timothy. He also sent him to the church at Ephesus according to **1st Timothy 1: 3.**

And when we see how Paul describes Timothy here, we see how trusted and dependent a brother in Christ Timothy was to Paul. By the way, Timothy does go back to Thessalonica and then meets up with Paul and Silas, not in Athens, but later in Corinth, and then Paul writes 1st Thessalonians as a result of Timothy's report to him.

Paul here calls Timothy **our brother**, not only because he was a true believer in Jesus Christ and could be called a brother in Christ, but a brother by experience with Paul in the trials and test they had gone through together.

He also calls him a **minister of God**. That word minister is *diakonos* it is where we get deacon from which is a servant and in this case a servant of God. Paul commends Timothy for not only his relationship with him as a brother but his relationship with God as well, as a servant. Is that the way someone would describe you, as a brother/sister in Christ & servant of God.

Then he describes him as a **fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ**. That was a familiar term that Paul used for those who ministered and labored along side of him. He used it of Timothy in **Romans 16: 21**, he used it of Titus in **2nd Corinthians 8: 23**, he used it of Epaphroditus in **Philippians 2: 25** and of Philemon in **Philemon 1**.

And notice what Timothy was a fellow laborer with Paul in and it was **the gospel of Christ**. He was a laborer and servant in sharing the gospel, the good news about Jesus Christ. Just as a side note, Paul calls it here 'the gospel of Christ'. Earlier in **chapter 2: 8, 10** he called it the gospel of God. Later in **2nd Thessalonians 1: 8** he will call it **the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ**. Which is it? The answer is yes!

It is one of those veiled affirmations that Jesus Christ is God. It is the gospel of God and it is the gospel of Jesus Christ because they are one in the same.

Also it is called both, because God is the source of the gospel and Christ is the subject of the gospel, right. It is the good news of salvation provided by God through Jesus Christ.

Paul then tells the church why he sent Timothy to them at the end of Verse 2; **To establish you and encourage you concerning your faith.** This church, although there was a lot to commend them for, as we saw in chapter one, was still a relatively new in their faith church, they still needed nurturing and help to grow spiritually. This was a practice common to Paul and the others after they had started a church, to go back and strengthen and encourage them.

Listen to **Acts 14: 21 – 22** and when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples exhorting them to continue in the faith ...

In **Acts 15: 41** it says that Paul and Silas went through Syria and Cilicia strengthening the churches. In **Acts 18: 23** it says he departed and went to the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order to strengthen all the disciples.

So what Paul asked Timothy to do was to **establish and encourage** this church. That word 'establish' means to strengthen or set resolutely or to be firm in, and in this case it is their **faith**, their faith in God and Christ and His word and all the truths contained in it that they would apply to their lives. He says 'I want your faith to be strengthened and solid and firm'. And then I want to 'encourage' *parakaleo* to come along side you, to live out those truths in your life.

You see, our faith in Christ must be strong if we are going to be able to apply the truths of that faith in our everyday lives. We must have that established, firm, strengthened faith on which to grow our spiritual lives.

The more you know about God and Christ and His word, the more resolute and strong you are in your faith which then encourages more confidence in Him to apply and live out His principles in your life.

The other side of that is; if I don't know much about God and Christ and His word and the doctrinal principles to live by, then your faith is weak and vacillating and immature when it comes to dealing with issues of life.

So how is Timothy going to do that, how is he going to establish and encourage and strengthen them? The same way they always did and any church leadership should do, through continued exposure and teaching of the doctrinal truths of the Word of God. **2nd Timothy 3: 16 all Scripture is...**

In **Acts 15: 32** it says **now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also exhorted and strengthened the brethren ... with many words.**

Paul will tell this church later in **2nd Thessalonians 2: 16 – 17** **may the Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God the Father ...comfort** (same word *parakaleo*) **your hearts and establish** (same word as strengthen) **you in every good WORD and WORK.** He wanted this church to be strong in their faith and strong in the living out of their faith. That is their pastoral care, to strengthen the people, that is my duty and privilege and ministry as well.

Then Paul says 'the reason I am so concerned about you being strengthened and encouraged in your faith is; Verse 3.

Verse 3: so that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this.

He says I don't want you to **be shaken** or moved or disturbed from your faith **by these afflictions**. One of the greatest causes for being moved from your faith is through persecution and affliction. He says 'that no one should be shaken or moved or disturbed by **these afflictions**, and you won't be if you are standing strong in your faith.

'These afflictions' *thilipsis* is used other places in scripture for trials, tests, temptations, persecutions, oppression, distress; it is pressing together from the outside. Maybe you have been there; when the pressures or temptations or trials that come from all around you seem to be overwhelming.

That was the concern that Paul had for the people of the church. That is the concern that I and the leadership of this church have for you. Paul says, you can't get through it if you strengthened in your faith through the Word. Not only that, Paul says you can get through this **for you yourselves know that we, you and me, were appointed to this.**

Paul says that trials and tests and temptations and distresses and persecutions are all a part of God's sovereign plan and sometimes you are **appointed to this** for His glory and for your benefit to be more like Christ. That is something that we need to understand today, that trials and test and persecutions are sometimes 'appointed' by God for our good.

Isn't that what **James 1: 2 – 4** says? **Count it all joy WHEN you fall into..** In **Philippians 1: 29** it says this wonderful statement; **for to you it has been GRANTED, by God, on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him but also to suffer for His sake.** In **1st Peter 4: 12 – 19** Peter concluded by saying **...therefore let those who suffer ACCORDING to the will of God,**

Peter says later in **1st Peter 5: 10** **may the God of all grace, who saved you, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen and settle you.** That is part of what these afflictions do and that is why Paul tells them and us that **you were appointed to this.** God has a purpose in our afflictions.

Then Paul says in **Verse 4:** **for in fact we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation just as it happened and you know.**

Paul says ‘we told you ahead of time’ that just as we have gone through these afflictions and trials and suffered tribulations as you have seen in us, so too you would go through them as well, just as it happened to us. So don’t be shaken by them, be strengthened by them as you find a greater dependence on God and His word through them. *Predicted and happened = strength.*

Paul **told them before** that they **would suffer tribulation**, as they had, because that was part of the gospel message and part of the ongoing instruction after someone is saved. This flies in the face of the health, wealth, prosperity gospel and the Jesus will fix your life, your finances, your marriage and your family gospel.

Because the bottom line is what Paul told Timothy in **2nd Timothy 3: 12** **all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will ... suffer persecution.** Jesus said in **John 15: 18 – 19** **if the world hates you know that it hated Me before it hated you...** Then He said in **John 16: 33** **... in the world you will have tribulation but be of good cheer I have overcome the world.**

Remember that He said on the sermon on the mount in **Matthew 5: 10 – 12** **blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake...blessed are you when they revile and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake...**

When someone comes to Christ by faith, they receive eternal life and temporary trouble, they should be told that and they should expect that. But when someone is told to come to Christ for a problem free, trouble free life and then the troubles come, they will question whether Jesus can do anything.

Listen, as a Pastor, part of what I am supposed to do is to get you to the place where you are strengthened and encouraged in your faith and able to apply that faith so that when these trials and tribulations do come along, you can get through them and bring glory to God as you do.

And because of that, I have a deeper compassion for you and a greater desire to see you maturing in your faith and being strengthened and encouraged in your faith so that when those times come, I will be encouraged by how you get through them. That is what Paul was so concerned about and why he repeats himself in verse 5 with what he said in verse 1.

Verse 5: for this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith...

For this reason, because you are suffering tribulations and trials, **I could no longer endure it**, so **I sent to know your faith**, how you are doing through these tribulations...He longed to know that his ministry to them was not in vain as we shall see next time, because he had a great love for them.

When you look at your life today as a born again believer, would you describe yourself or would others describe you as Paul did Timothy; a servant of God and fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ.

Would you describe your faith as established, strengthened and growing or stagnant, wavering and unsure? What part does the word of God and the encouragement of Christ through other believers have in your life today?

How do you view afflictions and tribulations and trials in your life? Do you understand that they are a part of the active, living Christian life or are you shaken by them to the point where you question God or yourself or blame God or others or say why me?

Do you pray for the leadership of this church to be the type of leaders that have a deep desire for your spiritual growth and strengthening of your faith that shows itself in a compassion for you.

Well, when it comes to our faith, we are all a work in progress and need the strengthening and encouragement of Christ and His word and from one another to keep us unshaken when it comes to facing what the world and the tempter may throw at us.

Closing Prayer

Lord's Table

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1st Thessalonians 3: 1 – 5
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Introduction and Review:
Acts 17: 5

Verse 1:
1st Thessalonians 1: 6, 2: 14
2nd Corinthians 11: 22 – 28, 1st Corinthians 4: 17
Philippians 2: 19 – 25, Romans 16: 21
2nd Corinthians 8: 23, Philemon 1
2nd Thessalonians 1: 8

Verse 2:
Acts 14: 21 – 22, 15: 41, 18: 23, 2nd Timothy 3: 16
Acts 15: 32, 2nd Thessalonians 2: 16 – 17

Verse 3:
James 1: 2 – 4, Philippians 1: 29
1st Peter 4: 12 – 19, 1st Peter 5: 10

Verses 4 – 5:
2nd Timothy 3: 12, John 15: 18 – 19, John 16: 33
Matthew 5: 10 – 12

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